

THINGS UNKNOWN

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*"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."
Jeremiah 33:3*

GOD'S people will never thrive on anything less substantial than bread from heaven. Israel in Egypt might live on garlic and onions, but Israel in the wilderness must be fed with the manna that came down from heaven, and with the water that gushed out of the rock, when it was smitten by the rod of God. The child of God, while he is yet in his sins, may, like other men, revel in them, and the pleasures and follies of this world may be his delight, but when he is once brought out of Egypt, by the high hand of God's purpose, and the almighty hand of God's strength, he will never live on anything less than God's promise and God's truth.

It is vain for men to try to remove his doubts and strengthen his self-confidence, it is vain for men to endeavor to feed himself with manmade doctrine or with rationalistic ideas, he must have something that is divine, that has the stamp of revelation upon it, in fact, unless we can come forth every Sabbath with a "Thus saith the LORD," we are not capable ministers of the New Covenant, and it is not in our power to comfort the Lord's children.

In this chapter we find the prophet Jeremiah in prison, he was shut up in the court of the prison, and in order to comfort him, the Word of the Lord came to him saying, "Thus saith the LORD." Something less than that may suffice, in the time of our prosperity, to make our hopes buoyant, for alas! there is enough of the natural man in the Christian to make him rejoice even in carnal things when he is far from being thoroughly sanctified, but when we are in trouble, when affliction and adversity, sickness and suffering, are trying us, there is no manmade raft upon which our soul can float through floods of tribulation and waves of deep distress, but we must have the divine life buoy of a "Thus saith the LORD."

That is what the Christian wants in every time and in every place, but this is what he more especially needs when he does business in deep waters, and is sorely exercised by affliction, "Thus saith the LORD." My text is a "Thus saith the LORD." "Thus saith the LORD, call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

Here is, first, *a large promise*, here is, secondly, *an implied imperfection*, and here is, thirdly, *a particular application of the promise, making up for that imperfection.*

I. Here is, first, A LARGE PROMISE, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee."

Now, if any friend should write us a letter containing such words as these, "Call unto me, and I will answer you," we should naturally understand by them, that whatever we might ask of our friend, he would most assuredly give us, and if he were a person in whose ability and kindness we had confidence, we should not be very slow in availing ourselves of his permission to seek his aid.

If we were in debt, we would apply to him for financial help, so that we might be able to meet our liabilities, if we were tried by sickness, we would apply to him that he might give us medicines to relieve our pains, if our friends had been ungrateful to us, we should most likely call upon him for sympathy, and if our spirits were distressed from some unknown cause, if we believed him to have immense wisdom, we should ask him for some cordial to raise us from our distress.

But how different is the case when we read these words as coming from the lips of God! Then, my brethren, how strange it is that, instead of making use of them, we just read them as a matter of course,

but we seldom think of making use of them. “Yes,” we say, “it is a very comforting doctrine, that God answers prayer, it is truly consolatory to hear our minister inform us that whatever we ask in prayer, believing, we shall receive.” But there the matter ends, and except with a few choice spirits, it remains a matter of doctrine, and not a matter of practice to us.

“O fools, and slow of heart to believe,” our Master might well say to us, and if He should come into our hearts, He would administer a thousand rebukes to us for our slackness in proving the truth of His promise. For God means what He says, and inasmuch as He has said, “Call unto me, and I will answer thee,” He intends that His words should stand good, and He wishes us to believe them to be true, and therefore to prove our faith by acting upon them.

Alas! the truth is too plain to be disputed, that the most of us, while in a sense, we receive this doctrine because it is in the Bible, do not so receive it as to put it into practice. In introducing to your notice, the great general truth, “Call unto me, and I will answer thee,” I shall probably have to answer a host of objections and questions.

“Well,” says one person, “would you wish us to believe, sir, that whatever we ask in prayer we shall receive?” I must reply to you with discretion. In the first place, who are you who now ask that question? Are you a child God, or are you a worldling? Have you been born again, or are you still what you were by nature, without any renewal from the Holy Spirit? For upon your answer to that question, mine must depend. If you are still without the Spirit of God, and are unrenewed, I would remind you of that passage which says, concerning the wicked, “Even his prayer shall be an abomination,” and if your prayer be an abomination, of course you cannot expect God to accept an abomination, and answer it. You must, therefore, know that you yourself are a partaker of the grace of God, or else this promise does not belong to you.

You grant me that, and then you ask me this question, “Sir, I hope I am a child of God, am I, therefore to understand that, whatever I shall ask for in prayer, I shall receive of God?” To you also I must answer with discretion, lest in endeavoring to state a truth, I should utter a falsehood. I must first ask you in what state of heart you are as a child of God. Have you been lately communing with Christ? Have you been constant in the study of His Word? What are your wishes? What are your wants? What are your desires? For upon your answers to these questions, my reply to your inquiry must depend.

It may be that you are a Christian, but nevertheless, though an Israelite, you, like Israel in the wilderness, are asking for meat that you may satisfy your own lust, even as they did, but when they craved for flesh and the Lord sent them quails, while the meat was yet in their mouths, the curse of the Lord came upon them.

We are sure to have our prayers answered, if it is right that they should be answered. Sometimes, even the Lord’s people ask for things which it would not be for God’s glory to give, or for their profit to receive. If you should tell your child you would give him anything he liked to ask for, you would not for a moment suppose that you included in the promise any absurd request he might make. Suppose he should ask you for a dose of arsenic, suppose he should request you to kill him, would you fulfill your promise? Certainly not. You would say, “My child, I love you too well to listen to the ravings of your madness, I desire your good too much to grant your absurd request, and I cannot hearken to you.”

God says the same, “‘Call upon me, and I will answer thee,’ but I will not always answer you as you wish to be answered. If you ask for a thing which is not fit for you to receive, I will give you something better. I will not give you that very thing, I will hear your prayers, but I will not give you exactly what you ask for, I will grant you something infinitely superior to the thing itself.”

It would be a sad thing if God always heard our prayers, and gave us just what we asked of Him. If He always gave us the exact thing we asked for, we should ruin ourselves. You may have heard the story of a woman who had a child who was very ill, and when her pastor called to see her, she asked him to pray for the child’s life, and in the prayer he very properly said, “O Lord, spare this child’s life, *if it be thy will*.” The mother interrupted him, and said, “No, I cannot have it so, this child must live. I want you to pray to God that the child may live whether God wills it or no.” The minister said, “Woman, you will

have cause to tremble on account of this petition. If you ask such a thing as this of God, there will be a curse upon it.” Nevertheless, the prayer was prayed, and twenty years afterwards, that woman, with an aching heart, saw her son riding in a cart to Tyburn, where he was to be hanged. Better would it have been for him and also for her that he had perished at the breast, and been carried to an untimely grave, than that he should send her grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. God, therefore, makes this very kind reservation that, if we ask for absurd things, things which would not be for our profit, He will not grant them.

But the question is put to me again, “Sir, if I ask for a thing which is obviously a good thing, which is most assuredly for my profit, may I be certain, after I have asked in prayer for that thing, that I shall have it?” Once more, I must ask another question. Have you yet learned the heavenly art of believing God? Because, you may be a Christian, you may believe in Christ enough for your soul’s salvation, but you may be so small a Christian that you have never yet attained the mountain height of belief in all your Lord has uttered. And mark you, the promise of an answer to our prayers is only given to our faith.

The Lord Jesus Christ put it thus to His disciples, “What things soever ye desire, when you pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” Now, if you go on your knees in prayer, and ask God for anything, and do not believe that He will give it to you, it may come in God’s extraordinary bounty, but it will not come in answer to your prayer. Your prayers shall be answered in proportion to your faith, so if you believe, and ask for a thing that is for your good and God’s glory, you will have it as surely as the promise is a promise, and God is God.

I have talked with many Christians, and some of my aged friends have talked with far more than I have, but both they and myself can bear witness that we have never yet met with any Christian that could charge God with breaking His promise. We have met with many who have been far from having the faith they ought to have, but we have never discovered one so faithless to God as to charge Him with not answering the prayer that was stamped with believing. Whenever there is faith, there will be the answer to the prayer of faith, you will never hear a Christian deny that truth.

It was my privilege some two years ago, when at Bristol, to visit the Orphan House of Mr. Müller, and I never saw a more striking or startling exhibition of the power of faith than I did there. Mr. Müller supports three hundred orphan children on no resources but his own faith and prayer. When he needs anything, he calls them together, offers supplication to God, and asks that necessities may be supplied, and although there are three hundred to be fed, to be clothed, and to be housed, and though they have often been brought so low that there has not been a farthing in their coffers, nor a handful of meal in their barrel, when mealtime has come, there has always been abundance of bread in the house in answer to prayer.

I shall never forget my interview with that holy man of God. Some gentleman said to me, “I wish you would ask Mr. Müller a question or two, if you see him, as to the foundation of a new Orphan House which he proposes to build to hold seven hundred more children. Now, I feel that three hundred is quite enough for one man to care for, I think it is very absurd for him to have seven hundred more, he will never be able to support a thousand. As to the preset Institution, I believe that generous persons hear about it, and send him subscriptions for its maintenance, but as to his supporting seven hundred more orphans, that is impossible.”

I replied, “I think there is something in what you say. I will ask him when I see him.” But when I saw him, I could not, and dared not, ask him any such questions, and when I saw what a great work he had done by his faith, and began to remark upon it, he said, “Oh! it is only a little thing that I have done, faith could do far more than that. If it were God’s will that I should feed the universe on prayer and faith, I could do it. If I had more faith, it could be accomplished.”

I was just going to say that, possibly, a thousand orphans would be more than he could support, when he said, “When I got three hundred children, I began to pray God to send me money to build an Orphan House to hold seven hundred more, and I have already £17,000 sent in for it, although I have never solicited a contribution from anybody but the Lord. I believe God has made me to be here, to be to

the world a proof that He hears and answers prayer.” I thought so too, when I saw that huge building, and the many dear children rising up to praise their God, and singing so sweetly in honor of the good Shepherd, who had gathered them like lambs to His bosom, and had gently folded them there.

Brethren, we do not speak without solid facts to confirm our assertion, when we affirm that, whatever a saint asks in prayer, if he asks in faith, and it is for his own profit, and for God’s glory, he will be sure to have it. I daresay you have read Huntington’s, “Bank of Faith.” He certainly gives us too many of those instances for most people to believe, but I fancy there are plenty of persons alive who have had as many answers to their prayers as ever William Huntington had, and who, if they were to write the minutiae of their lives, could bear most solemn testimony to the truth that never could they remember God being unfaithful to His promises, or their prayers unanswered.

This, however, must always depend upon the person himself, for if we ask waveringly, or without faith, we must not expect to be answered. We must not forget that what God implies, when He does not grant unbelieving requests, is just this, “Inasmuch as you have no faith, I have nothing to give you.”

We must do as the people did at Christmas time in the olden days. It used to be the custom for the poor inhabitants in a village to go round with basins to the rich people in the parish, and beg bread and other victuals of them, and the rule was, that every gentleman was to fill the bowl that was brought to his door. Of course, the wisest amongst the poor folk brought a very large bowl for the Christmas gathering, but those who had little faith in the generosity of their wealthy neighbors took a small bowl, and that was filled, but those who took a big bowl had theirs filled too.

So, dear friends, you must always try, in your prayers, to bring a big bowl to God. Bring great faith, and rest assured that, according to your faith, it shall be done unto you. If you have little faith, you shall have a little answer, if you have tolerable faith, you shall have a tolerable answer, and if you have a mighty faith, you shall have such a mighty answer that you shall wonder at it, yet you shall feel that it is according to the promise of our text, “Call unto me, and I will answer thee.”

II. Now we come to the second part of our subject, and we notice AN IMPLIED IMPERFECTION, “Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.” It is implied that God’s people do not know everything.

Did you ever meet a man who knew everything? I have happened to meet half-a-dozen such. I once met with a minister who knew all things—according to his own account I mean, not according to mine. He told me, when I saw him, that in the parish where he lived, there were not more than a dozen people who knew the Lord Jesus Christ in truth. I was interested in that man, for I knew a little about him, so I said to him, “Well, who are they?”

So he began, “Well, there is myself, and my wife, and my two deacons,” and so on. “Oh!” I answered, “the only person I should dispute out of that number would be yourself, because I think you know too much by a great deal, you seem to have climbed up, and to have looked into the secret roll of God’s decrees. No child of God would do that. Children do not look into their father’s secrets, it is only thieves who do that. I doubt your claim to be a child of God.”

Each of us at times, meets with an interesting individual who knows far too much, in whose company one always feels uncomfortable. We never introduce any subject, we leave him to do that, because he is the Pope of our circle. He hates Popery, of course, two Popes cannot agree, so naturally, he has a very strong objection to the Pope of Rome.

He himself knows all things. You utter a sentiment, he tells you directly that it is not sound, he knows, of course. You talk about a matter of experience, but he says, “That is not the experience of the living child of God.” He is umpire, of course, he knows all about it, he is the judge who ends all strife, he settles everything. Bring him in, his vote is the casting vote, which it is almost profane to controvert. He is King, Lords and Commons, all rolled into one, he makes the laws, and he fulfils them. He is, in his own sphere, the Autocrat of all Christians.

Now, God’s children belong to a very different order of beings from this very respectable and very venerable individual, they do not know everything, and they do not pretend to be full of all knowledge.

One of the best of them, whose name was Paul, said, “Not as though I have already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

An old man once met a young one who had been to College about six months, and he said to him, “Do you know much?” “Yes,” the young man answered, “I am getting on very fast.” The old man said, “You will not say that in a year’s time, or else I shall have no hope for you.” In a year’s time, he asked him whether he knew much more than he did six months before. He replied, “Sometimes, I think I know a great deal more, but at other times, I think I know a great deal less. I have discovered my own ignorance more than ever this last year.”

Then the old man said, “By the time you have been in college four years, you will confess yourself to be a very great fool,” and when he met him, during the fourth year, he said, “What do you know now?” The student replied, “I think, perhaps I know more than when I entered College, but in my own opinion, I know much less. When I first came, I thought myself competent to give a decisive opinion upon every subject, now, I am obliged to weigh everything before I am able to state anything positively. My own ignorance has been discovered.”

Now, depend upon it, dear friends, it will be the same with each of you. We may think, when we first join the church, “We know almost everything.” Some people suppose that all the truth is found in the Baptist denomination, others imagine it is all in the Episcopalian, Independent, or Wesleyan denomination, or in whatever sect they belong to, but when we have been members of the Baptist denomination for some considerable time, we discover that there are several faults among us, and we think, perhaps, that if we were fashioned according to the Presbyterian model, we might be improved.

By and by, we find a friend who attends an Episcopal church, where he hears the Gospel very plainly preached by a very earnest clergyman, and we say we think there is something good in the Episcopalians, and the longer we live, the more we find that there is something good in all, and that, after all, we do not know as much as we thought we did, and that our church, though it seemed to be the very model of perfection, is found to be full of infirmities, as well as any other church, and it is not exactly *the* church after all.

I repeat, then, the assertion that is implied in the text, that we have, all of us, a certain amount of ignorance and imperfection, for if we knew all things, we should have no necessity for this promise, that God would show us great and mighty things, which we do not know. But as we are still imperfect, and growing in our knowledge, this promise is exceedingly precious to us. I can scarcely think that I have any person here of that particular clique, who fancy they know everything. If I have, I would say a word to him. There is a certain body of excellent men, who call themselves “God’s dear people!” That is just what they are, they are dear to anybody, nobody would think of buying them. If they were to be given away, they would be scarcely worth having.

They are God’s *dear* people. They hear their minister preach a sermon, made up of the extract of gall and bitterness, and that just pleases them. His people rejoice in that kind of talk, and say that he is a faithful minister. If he were to leave off being bitter, he would not be faithful—faithfulness, according to their meaning, consists in finding fault with all the world besides.

They tell you to go to “Little Bethel,” “Rehoboth,” or “Bethesda,” because there is no truth anywhere else. It is only there that the truth is to be had, and all other congregations are schismatics, whom it is their duty to denounce and persecute with the utmost rigor of the Gospel, and you are aware that the utmost rigor of the Gospel is worse than the utmost rigor of the law. The rigor of the Gospel is more intolerable than even the rule of Draco himself, for those persons exclude, denounce, and condemn every man who is not to the very turn of a hair’s breadth in conformity with their views.

To every such person we say, “Dear brother, you are very wise! All hail to you! We will put you in the chair as the marvelous Doctor of Divinity. You are the man, wisdom will die with you, and while we

humbly bow at your feet, we are obliged to say that you do not know everything yet, there are a few things that need to be revealed even to you, and while we keep ourselves at a respectful distance from anything like your superior knowledge, we are compelled to think that you have not yet attained unto perfection, and we cannot admit that you are the only man in all the world who understands and knows the Gospel.”

Well, though our brother will not join with us in saying, “We do not know all things,” I think that all who are here present will bow their heads, and each one will say, “Lord, teach me what I do not know, for the little that I know is nothing to be compared with the volumes of Thy wisdom which I have not read, and do not yet understand.”

III. Now we come to the third head of our subject, which is the best of all. We have here THE PARTICULAR APPLICATION OF THE PROMISE, “Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.”

First, we understand this promise to relate to *Gospel doctrines*. I confess that, when I first preached in a country village as its pastor, I read all Dr. Gill’s, “Body of Divinity” and Calvin’s “Institutes,” and when I had done that, I thought, “Now I have got hold of *the truth*, I am certain I have, and I can meet all opponents, and if they are not conformed to the views of that most learned man, Dr. Gill, and that excellent confessor, John Calvin, I will soon cut them up root and branch.”

Well, I began to preach what I had learned from these great and good men, and I have never been ashamed of having done so, for as a successor of Dr. Gill, I am not ashamed to endorse his views, even now, and to subscribe to the doctrinal statements that John Calvin uttered. However, I soon began to find out that there was a good deal to be said, after all, concerning some matters that Dr. Gill and John Calvin did not mention, and I found that I was obliged somewhat to stretch my charity, and to take to my heart some brethren who did not quite see all things which those enlightened men saw.

And moreover, I found out that I did not know everything, and that I had a good deal still to learn, and I find the same thing every day. I hope at all times to hold firmly all the truth I have received. I intend to grasp tightly with one hand the truths I have already learned, and to keep the other hand wide open to take in the things I do not yet know.

Perhaps I have some young man here who has a notion that some minister has got all the truth, or that he himself has embraced all the truth. Now, young man, there are a great many things that you do not know, there are some doctrines you do not understand. If you will wait a little while, and study your Bible more, you will go down on your knees and say, “Lord, I never knew my own ignorance so much as I do now, will You teach me Your truth?”

Do we desire to understand the truth of God? Let us not be discouraged. In answer to our prayers, God will show us “great and mighty things” which we do not know now. You are a Christian, yet you do not comprehend the doctrine of election, or the doctrine of effectual calling puzzles you. You are a Churchman, perhaps, yet you do not know anything about these things.

You are like a man I met once in a railway carriage. He said he was a High Churchman, and I said I was a High Churchman too. “How can that be?” he inquired, “You are a Dissenter.” “But,” I replied, “I believe many of the doctrines of your church.” He said, “I think not.” “Well,” I said “I believe in the doctrines of election, predestination, and so on.” “Oh!” he said, “I do not.” “But,” I said, “they are in your Articles.” He said, “I believe the Catechism, but I have not read the Articles.” “Then,” I rejoined, “I am the better Churchman of the two, you are the Dissenter, and I am the High Churchman. You ought to be turned out of the church if you do not believe the Articles. They ought to take me, and give me a first rate living, and make me one of their bishops, for I have read the Articles, and studied them.”

A great many people do not know what they believe. No person has a right to say he is a Churchman, till he has read the Prayer book. You have no right to say you are Wesleyan till you have read Wesley’s sermons, and you have no right to say you are a Calvinist till you have read what Calvin believed, and you have no right to say you are a Christian till you have read your Bible, for the Bible is the standard of Christian faith and practice, and when you come to read your Bibles, you will find this

one thing out, that your own little views were not quite so wide as the Bible after all, and you will have to say, “Lord, show me great and mighty things, which I know not now.”

I am persuaded that neither the Church of England, nor the Wesleyans, nor the Independents, nor the Baptists, have got all the truth. I would not belong to any one of these denominations, for all the land that is beneath the sky, if I had to endorse all that is held by them. I believe that the church ought to be governed by an Episcopalian Presbyterian Baptist Independency. I believe we are all right in a great many of our doctrines, but that we all have something yet to learn.

The doctrine of “man’s responsibility” is not to be denied, nor the doctrine of “God’s sovereignty” to be disputed. I hope that some day, we shall all bring our views to the test of the Sacred Scriptures. Then shall we have one church, “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” Then shall we know great and mighty things which we know not now.

I would persuade you, my Baptist friends, that your system is not perfect, and you members of the Episcopalian Church, that your polity is not altogether without imperfection, and I would entreat you, my friend, though you are a member of an excellent body of believers, however excellent that church may be, not to think it is infallible. Go down on your knees, and ask God to teach you what you do not know and to make you better than your creed, or else, in nine cases out of ten, you will not be worth much.

But next, “great and mighty things, which thou knowest not,” God will show you *in providence*. A poor man is in trouble, he has not wherewithal to buy daily bread. Let him call upon God, and ask for it, and though he has never seen the Lord thrust out His hand from heaven, or feed him by the ravens, or quench his thirst with water out of the rock, let him go down on his knees, and he will find that there are more wonders in providence than you and I have seen yet.

In answer to prayer, we shall see how God’s providence, though it is far beyond our ideas, is according to our prayers. There are many Christians who have been in great trouble, and have experienced a most marvelous deliverance in providence. If we have great trouble, let us bring them to our great God, let us cry unto Him, and in providence we shall see “great and mighty things” which we know not as yet.

In the next place, very briefly passing over these points, “great and mighty things, which thou knowest not,” God will show you *in matters of Christian experience*. Let us search God’s Word, and give ourselves to prayer, and then, in matters of experience, we shall see “great and mighty things” which we know not yet. A Christian is immeasurably beyond the worldling, and there is a possibility of a Christian becoming as much beyond himself as he now is beyond a sinner dead in sins. There is no telling how great he may become even on earth. I do not think we can ever on earth become perfect, but we know not how near to perfection we may come. We may not, whilst on earth, dwell in heaven, but who can tell how much of heaven may dwell in us while we are here?

Did you ever sit down and read the Life of Herbert, or Whitefield, or Haliburton? After we have read such books, we say within ourselves, “What poor worms we are!” We feel like Robert Hall, who, when a certain minister came to see him, said, “I am so glad to see you! Mr. So-and-so has been here, he is so far above me, that I felt myself to be nothing in his presence, but now I begin to feel myself a man again.”

Have you never felt, when in the company of some great and mighty man, as if you were nothing at all? When I first read Henry Martyn’s Life, I could not refrain from weeping for some hours afterwards, to think how much below such a life as his I was living. Yet you know not but that you may climb where these men did, the steps of the mountain of piety may be steep to look upon, but they are accessible to the feet of diligence. Go on, and you shall yet stand where Moses stood, and behold Canaan from the top of Nebo. Remember that you are as yet upon the lowlands, be not ashamed to acknowledge that you are desirous to climb upwards. Bend your knees, and God will show you in experience “great and mighty things” that you know not yet.

If any man is content with his own experience, it is entirely through ignorance. I will defy anyone to take Rutherford's Letters, and sit down, and after he has read them, to help saying, "Rutherford seems to have been like an angel of God, I am only a man, I never can stand where Rutherford stood." Frequently, when I return home from chapel on the Sabbath evening, I get down George Herbert's book of songs, and when I see how much he loved the Lord, it seems to me as if he had struck upon his harp the very notes that he had heard in Paradise, and sung them all again.

Let us not be discouraged, we may yet become Herberts, and Rutherfords, and Whitefields, nay, there is no reason why we should not become as great as the Old or New Testament saints. There is no reason why we should not be as great as Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, for why should not every child of God, in these days, become as mighty a man of faith as was Abraham of old? Let us plead the promise of the text, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

And to conclude, the same truth holds good *with regard to the universal church of God*. I do not know whether you may have noticed that the devil, in his wisdom, has just tried to pervert all our services. My heart has been made glad by the opening of Exeter Hall for the preaching of the Gospel! Never did my heart so leap for joy as when I heard that our brethren of the Church of England had begun to preach in Exeter Hall, though I felt sad when those doors were shut against them.

Now our joys are blasted, and our happiness is clouded. It appears that, because some have lately endeavored to turn to good account the earnestness of the people to hear the Word in their own churches and chapels, next Sunday we shall see the lamentable spectacle, in this great metropolis, of a place, not open simply for the preaching of the Word, but actually for a Sabbath Concert [Mr. Spurgeon was referring to the arrangements which had been made for a sacred concert and a Gospel address combined at the Alhambra Palace. Happily, the minister who took the service abandoned it after one attempt, being convinced that more harm than good would result from it, but unhappily, since then, not only have sacred concerts been regularly established, either with or without Gospel addresses, but many places are open, on the Lord's-day for secular concerts, at which there is not even the pretence of any religious service. Our comfort still is, as it was Mr. Spurgeon's over forty years ago, that "the LORD reigneth," and He will get the victory over all His adversaries].

We shall read of multitudes assembled in a building, the property of one connected with a theater, we shall hear of people being gathered together, and there will be a person found who will profess to preach the Gospel to them, and the "Messiah" will be performed as the great inducement for attracting them.

Perhaps there is no person who feels more sorrow than I do that this fearful cloud has fallen upon us. The devil may one day open the Crystal Palace, the Museum, and every other place on Sunday, but the Lord reigneth, and if this nation shall be given up to Sabbath breaking, let us not despair. God sits as the ruler in heaven, and as surely as He is God, He will get the victory. The devil will outwit himself, as he has always done, Satan will fall into his own pit.

I hope, however, that the Christians of Great Britain will be very earnest in calling upon God. Pray continually to the Most High, that He will prosper the preaching of the Gospel to the multitude, but that He will never allow our entering into unconsecrated places to be twisted and turned to unhallowed uses, and that God will bring forth greater good out of the great evil, and so glorify Himself, and thus show us great and mighty things that we know not.

I can only now beseech the Lord to pour His blessing upon each of you. May you be earnest in prayer, and constant in supplication, and if you have never known Christ yet, may He soon be made known to you by the Holy Spirit, and may your prayers be lifted up to heaven that He may show you His salvation, which is one of the "great and mighty things" which you know not now!

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.